

BIF Gives Honors

Winners announced at Beef Improvement Federation meeting.

The Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) honored several individuals during its annual research symposium and meeting in Lincoln, Neb., June 18-21. Co-hosted by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL), Nebraska Cattlemen and the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (USMARC), the theme for this year’s program was “Novel Traits: Needed or Novelty.”

Highlights of those honored follow.

Commercial Producer of the Year

CB Farms Family Partnership was named Commercial Producer of the Year. Berry and Carla Bortz began ranching near Preston, Kan., more than 30 years ago. Both graduated from Kansas State University (K-State) in 1982. They were married the following week and started farming in eastern Pratt County with two irrigated circles, two dryland quarters and about 300 acres of grass, which they used to background calves.

They started a family in 1986, with the birth of their son Brandon, who was soon followed by daughter Amber in 1987 and son Darnell in 1991. As the kids grew, so did the farm. In 2001, they started their cow herd and reduced the number of cattle purchased per year. Brandon and his wife, Cari, returned to the farm in 2012.

Today they farm 19 irrigated circles, 2,500 acres of dry land and 2,000 acres of native grass. They have 550 spring-calving cows, of which 150 are registered black Angus. They also operate a 1,500-head feedyard. They grow corn, wheat, soybeans, milo, sunflowers, cotton, alfalfa, Bermuda and feed. They finish all their calves, along with calves purchased

from their bull customers, at home. The calves are marketed through U.S. Premium Beef (USPB).

Other nominees were Hansen Family Ranches, Livermore, Colo.; James Kean, Louisa, Va.; and XA Cattle Co., Moorefield, Neb.

Seedstock Producer of the Year

Schuler Red Angus was named Seedstock Producer of the Year. The ranch is located in the panhandle of western Nebraska on Lawrence Fork Creek. Darrell and Mary Lou Schuler began raising commercial Herefords there in 1959. By the 1970s, they were using Red Angus bulls and discovered that the crossbred calves were superior to the ranch’s traditional straightbred cattle. A registered-Red Angus herd was started in 1976 to develop genetics for the ranch’s commercial herd and provide seedstock for neighboring ranches.

The seedstock herd expanded in the 1980s and continued to improve through the use of artificial insemination (AI), performance testing and a data-based breeding program utilizing expected progeny differences (EPDs). Customer input and feedback from meatpackers regarding the ranch’s finished commercial cattle encouraged the Schulers to begin collecting carcass data in 1991. They later developed structured carcass tests utilizing their own and customers’ cattle. Today, more than 25% of Red Angus’ high-accuracy carcass-trait sires have been proven by Schuler Red Angus.

A composite seedstock herd called

“Schuler Reds” — which uses Red Angus, Simmental and Gelbvieh genetics — was started in 1992.

The current ranching operation encompasses 17,000 acres, including 2,000 acres of private pasture leases and 1,250 acres of irrigated farm ground. Butch and Susan Schuler, with their children Stephanie and David, manage the operation of approximately 1,000 head of spring-calving females.

Other nominees were Marshall Cattle Co., Burlington, Colo.; Shelton Angus Farm, Gretna, Va.; Wedel Red Angus, Leoti, Kan.; and Wells Farm, Selma, Ala.

BIF Pioneers

BIF honored three individuals with the Pioneer Award, which recognizes those who have made lasting contributions to the improvement of beef cattle. Gary Bennett of the USMARC at Clay Center, Neb.; Merlyn Nielsen of the UNL; and Earlham, Iowa, -cattlemen Steve Radakovich were honored for having a major role in acceptance of performance reporting and documentation as the primary means to make genetic change in beef cattle.

Bennett grew up on a diversified farm in Iowa and received his bachelor’s degree from Iowa State University and his master’s and doctoral degrees from Ohio State University in 1975 and 1977, respectively. He completed a postdoctoral study with Gordon Dickerson at the University of Nebraska (NU), and then served as a scientist with AgResearch in New Zealand for several years.

Bennett joined USMARC as a research



► **Larry Kuehn** (center) of the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center at Clay Center, Neb., receives a Beef Improvement Federation Continuing Service Award from Steve Whitmire (right), 2013-2014 BIF president and Ron Lewis, USMARC.



► **Merlyn Nielsen** (left), University of Nebraska–Lincoln, receives a BIF Pioneer Award from Whitmire.



► **Steve Radakovich** (center), Radakovich Cattle Co., Earlham, Iowa, receives a BIF Pioneer Award from Whitmire (right) and Dorian Garrick, Iowa State University.



► **CB Farms Family Partnership** of Preston, Kan., was named the 2014 BIF Commercial Producer of the Year during an awards ceremony June 19 at the Cornhusker Marriott Hotel in Lincoln, Neb. Pictured at the awards ceremony are (from left) Whitmire; Carla and Berry Bortz, recipients; and Burt Rutherford, *BEEF* magazine, award sponsor.



► **Schuler Red Angus**, Bridgeport, Neb., was named the 2014 BIF Seedstock Producer of the Year during an awards ceremony June 20 at the Cornhusker Marriott Hotel. Pictured at the awards ceremony are (from left) Whitmire; Butch, Susan, Stephanie and David Schuler, recipients; and Rutherford.

geneticist in 1985. He became a research leader in 1988. In that role, he supervised scientists and research in the disciplines of production systems modeling; quantitative and statistical genetics; molecular genetics; animal health; and applied beef, swine and sheep breeding. He currently supervises 12 scientists spanning all of those disciplines except production systems.

Bennett is a leader in the field of genetics and selection of beef cattle. For the past two decades, he has led and managed a series of beef cattle selection experiments involving more than 1,000 cows each year. The first of these demonstrated the efficacy of breeding curve-bender bulls that excel for antagonistic traits such as calving ease and growth.

Bennett has also contributed substantially to research on beef cattle genomics, sequencing, selection for twinning, study of interactions between genes with large effects, and to international collaborations and grants.

He served as division editor for the *Journal of Animal Science* from 2001-2005 and serves on an Agriculture Research Service patent

committee. He received the Rockefeller Prentice Memorial Animal Breeding Award from the American Society of Animal Science in 2001, and was named a Distinguished Alumnus of Ohio State's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences in 2011.

Nielsen received his bachelor's degree from UNL, and both a master's degree and doctorate at Iowa State University under the direction of Richard Willham. Nielsen's early research developed procedures to predict breeding values in beef cattle, and he wrote the computer programs used in the first national sire evaluation.

Utilizing an experimental population at UNL, Nielsen clearly demonstrated the economic efficiencies that could be gained by selecting for lower levels of milk production in a beef enterprise.

Over the years, Nielsen's research interests changed to mice, focusing on reproductive performance, survival and efficiency. With selection for high and low heat production in mice as a proxy measure of energy for maintenance, Nielsen demonstrated that genetic variation for maintenance energy requirements exists. Although this was done in a model species, it undoubtedly shaped research directions in beef cattle, greatly advancing basic knowledge of genetic control of heat production, feed intake for maintenance and associations with production traits.

Nielsen has been instrumental in helping form the BIF guidelines for feed intake recording, and led the BIF task force for guidelines on use of this information in national cattle evaluation.

Nielsen is currently the Kermit Wagner Professor in the UNL Animal Science Department, specializing in quantitative genetics.

Born and raised in Iowa, Radakovich

represents the third generation of Earlham, Iowa, Radakoviches. His father raised pigs, but he always preferred beef cattle.

Radakovich received his bachelor's degree at Iowa State University in animal sciences, where he was greatly influenced by Jim Kiser. He then completed a master's degree at Colorado State University (CSU).

Afterward, Radakovich returned to Earlham with Penny, his wife. Together they began to raise a family and to establish a bull breeding business, first with Hereford cattle, then later including Angus and various composites.

In his pursuit of cattle fitness, he experimented with various composite breeds, including those with tropical adaptation like Senepol, and gained a reputation for producing seedstock that could perform well in tough conditions.

Radakovich was one of the first cattle breeders to use high-density SNP genotyping to confirm his herd's ancestry and breeding potential. He has collected hair samples on many of his cattle for future use, but because of the current focus of genomic predictions on traits other than fitness, he is yet to be convinced of its utility for improvement of his cattle.

Radakovich's focus on adaptability, system thinking and his ability to communicate led to frequent and ongoing invitations to speak at national and international cattle events, including in five of the six continents where cattle are raised.

The Radakoviches have leased their farm to neighbor Steve Ory, but they maintain a bull breeding partnership.

BIF Continuing Service

BIF honored four individuals who have made major contributions to the BIF organization with the Continuing Service

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► Gary Bennett (left) of the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center at Clay Center, Neb., receives a BIF Pioneer Award from Whitmire.

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Award. Larry Kuehn and Warren Snelling of USMARC; Susan Willmon of the American Gelbvieh Association, Westminster, Colo.; and Wade Shafer of the American Simmental Association, Bozeman, Mont., were this year's recipients.

Kuehn is a research geneticist for the USMARC, and is well-known throughout the industry for his work on the Germplasm Evaluation Program with emphases on genetics of bovine respiratory disease susceptibility and feed efficiency.

At the USMARC, Kuehn conducts studies that focus on genetic improvement of cattle through genetic selection on phenotypic and genetic marker data. He is responsible for the analysis of marker data to determine whether they are a useful indicator of genetic merit for multiple traits.

Kuehn is also involved with software development for statistical genetics applications and evaluation of analysis methods through simulation. In addition, he is responsible for annual updates to the across-breed expected progeny difference (AB-EPD) adjustment factors used to compare genetic predictions of growth and carcass traits across breeds of beef cattle.

Kuehn's contributions to the industry go beyond his scientific research. He is a strong leader within the trade and volunteers to help advance genetic progress throughout many areas in the beef cattle business. He holds a bachelor's degree in animal science from NU, a master's degree in animal breeding from CSU and a doctoral degree in animal breeding from Virginia Tech.

Shafer graduated from North Dakota State University in 1984, and completed a master's degree and doctorate at CSU. While there, he assisted in teaching principles of animal breeding, population genetics, selection index theory/best linear unbiased prediction,

advanced cattle breeding, reproductive physiology.

He joined the American Simmental Association (ASA) in 2004 as the director of performance programs, working closely with Jerry Lipsey. Together, they led Simmental breeders forward in the areas of carcass testing and total cow-herd indexing. In 2011, upon Lipsey's departure from the leadership of the ASA, Shafer was selected to assume the reins as executive vice president.

Shafer is an avid proponent of BIF, what it stands for, the use of performance tools and the use of total trait indexing. He is a strong advocate, mentor and teacher.

Snelling graduated from K-State and completed a master's degree at CSU in 1988. After graduation, he worked in a lab where he took the lead producing genetic evaluations for a number of cattle breeds and organizations for nearly six years. While working in the lab, Snelling completed his doctorate in 1994, which resulted in the first expected progeny difference (EPD) for stayability.

He later worked at Beefbooster Management out of Calgary, Canada, and in 2001 became a research geneticist for the USMARC, where he remains in a leadership role. While at Clay Center, he has been responsible for or collaborated in a number of important and innovative projects. His work is largely focused on genomic analysis, and he has authored and co-authored numerous important papers, including the well-known 2010 science publication on the Genomic Sequence of Taurine Cattle.

Snelling also has worked with Line 1 Hereford data, developed some of the first DNA quantitative trait loci (QTL) maps and linkage maps, including coordinating an international effort to construct a composite linkage-radiation hybrid map of the bovine

genome sequence. Snelling has led research into genome-wide association studies that have revealed portions of the genome associated with growth, feedlot intake and carcass fat.

Snelling's leadership includes serving on the editorial board for the *Journal of Animal Science*. He is also an associate editor for *BMC Genomics*.

Willmon is a native of Northbrook, Ill. She earned a bachelor's degree at CSU and a master's degree in animal breeding at the University of Illinois, studying with Jim Gibb and Dan Gianola.

Willmon spent the early part of her career in the human health software business, but her passion for animal science brought her back to the beef industry. In 2002 she joined Genetic Solutions as manager of customer service. Three years later, Willmon joined the American Gelbvieh Association (AGA) as director of breed improvement, where she currently remains.

During Willmon's time at the AGA, she has guided the transitions to whole-herd reporting and to genome-enhanced expected progeny differences (GE-EPDs). More recently she has facilitated the development of a multi-breed stayability EPD and the AGA maternal index.

After two years with AGA, Willmon took on IT management at AGA and has overseen two registry system conversions.

Willmon has played an integral role in BIF, serving on the committee that developed guidelines for teat and udder scoring. For the 2007 annual meeting she served on the organizing committee and co-developed the 2007 BIF video, "A History of Gaining Value from Genetics" that celebrated the 40th anniversary of BIF. She served two terms on the board of directors as a breed association representative, during which time she was



► **Warren Snelling** (left) of the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center at Clay Center, Neb., receives a BIF Continuing Service Award from Whitmire.



► The Frank Baker Memorial Scholarship was awarded to **Heather Bradford** (right), Kansas State University, and **Xi Zeng**, Colorado State University.



► The Roy A. Wallace Memorial scholarship was awarded to **Heather Bradford**, Kansas State University, and **Macy Lienemann**, University of Nebraska. Pictured are (from left) Lienemann; Bradford; and Aaron Arnett, Select Sires.

part of the BIF strategic-planning team that set the direction for BIF.

Ambassador Award

BIF honored John Maday, of *Drovers/CattleNetwork* and *Bovine Veterinarian* magazines, with the Ambassador Award. This award is given annually by BIF to a member of the media for his or her efforts in spreading the news of BIF and its principles to a larger audience.

A native of southern Wisconsin, Maday earned a bachelor's degree in agronomy from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He continued his education at the University of Florida, earning a master's degree in agricultural extension education. Afterward, Maday worked for six years coordinating in-service training for Florida vocational agriculture teachers. He also spent 18 months in Cameroon teaching at the National College of Agriculture.

In 1993 Maday joined the staff at *Drovers/CattleNetwork* magazine and quickly became recognized as a talented writer capable of covering complex subjects in all facets of beef production and marketing. He has written hundreds of news stories, management features and opinion columns for America's beef producers.

Specifically, Maday has reported on a wide range of issues relative to genetic improvement and the profitability of beef cattle. His work examined issues of importance to commercial and purebred breeders such as the use of structured crossbreeding systems, EPDs, selection indices and genomics tools. His work extends the reach of BIF's goals and mission to aid in the genetic improvement of beef cattle for both seedstock and commercial producers.

As a testament to his journalistic skills and his prolific production, Vance Publishing named him editor of *Bovine Veterinarian* magazine in 2013, a role he fills in addition to his duties as managing editor of *Drovers/CattleNetwork*.

During his tenure at *Drovers/CattleNetwork*, Maday's contributions helped the publication earn two prestigious Jesse H. Neal awards from the American Business Media. Last year he was honored with the National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA) 2013 Advocacy in Animal Agriculture Award. Over the years his peers have recognized him with numerous writing awards from the Livestock Publications Council (LPC) and the American Agricultural Editor's Association (AAEA).

Roy A. Wallace Memorial Scholarship

BIF awarded Maci Lienemann (undergraduate) and Heather Bradford (graduate) Roy A. Wallace Memorial Scholarships. The award recognizes two students who have made a significant commitment and passion for the industry.

Hailing from Princeton, Neb., Lienemann is a junior at UNL majoring in animal science with a focus in biology. She stays busy as an Animal Science Student Ambassador and the 2013-2014 American Angus Association Ambassador, all while maintaining a 4.0 grade point average. She served as the 2012-2013 Nebraska FFA state vice president her freshman year at UNL.

She has an active role on her family's first-generation registered-Angus operation, Lienemann Cattle Co., and owns her own personal herd of 20 registered-Angus cattle. In addition, she has worked as the assistant marketing and sales coordinator for Lienemann Management Products (LMP).

Lienemann has worked as a part-time lab technician for GeneSeek while in school. This summer she is a research intern in the breeding, genetics and animal health division of the USMARC.

Lienemann has aspirations to obtain an advanced degree in animal science, specifically focused in livestock genetics.

An Ohio native, Bradford is working on her doctorate at Kansas State University (K-State). Her master's research project at K-State calculated genetic parameters for udder quality in Hereford cattle. She earned a bachelor's degree in animal science from Purdue University.

Bradford's passion for the beef industry stems from her family's involvement with seedstock cattle. Her industry involvement is extensive. She interned with Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) in 2013 and has been a research assistant at the Indiana Beef Evaluation Program.

While at K-State, she contributed to graduate school 2015 strategic planning and was the secretary-treasurer of the Animal Sciences & Industry Graduate Student Association. She was a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society and was an active member in the National Junior Hereford Association.

The Roy A. Wallace Beef Improvement Federation Memorial Fund was established to honor the life and career of Roy Wallace. Wallace, who worked for Select Sires for 40 years, served as vice president of beef programs and devoted his life to the improvement of beef cattle. He became

involved with BIF in its infancy and attended each of the first 40 BIF conventions. He loved what BIF stood for — bringing together purebred and commercial cattle breeders, academia and breed associations, all committed to improving beef cattle.

Frank Baker Memorial Scholarship

BIF honored Xi Zeng, CSU, and Bradford with the Frank Baker Memorial Scholarship Award. The Frank Baker Memorial Scholarship Award Essay competition for graduate students provides an opportunity to recognize outstanding student research and competitive writing in honor of Frank Baker. Baker is widely recognized as the "Founding Father" of the BIF. He played a key leadership role in helping establish BIF in 1968, while he was chairman of the UNL Department of Animal Science.

Zeng is a doctoral student and research assistant in the Department of Animal Science at CSU specializing in breeding and genetics. She grew up in rural southwest China and spent her childhood working with livestock, fostering her interest in livestock studies. After high school, she attended Sichuan Agriculture University, majoring in animal science.

In 2010, after completing a four-year bachelor's degree in agronomy of animal science, she enrolled at CSU where she completed a master's degree in breeding and genetics in 2013. Zeng continues her studies under Milton Thomas and Mark Enns, pursuing a doctorate in breeding and genetics at CSU and assisting with genetic evaluation at the CSU Center for Genetic Evaluation of Livestock.

She currently collaborates with her colleagues in studying high-altitude disease's indicator trait-pulmonary arterial pressure. She will present her work "High Altitude Disease and Genetics of Beef Cattle at High Elevation Regions" at the 2014 World Congress of Genetics Applied to Livestock Production this August in Vancouver, Canada.

Zeng is a three-time recipient of the Dr. H.H. Stonaker Scholarship award and has also received the Petry Scholarship, and BIF Graduate Student Travel Scholarship.



Editor's Note: The Angus Journal and LiveAuctions.tv provide comprehensive online coverage of the event at www.BIFconference.com. Visit the Newsroom for summaries, proceedings, PowerPoints and audio of the sessions; the Awards page for announcements of award winners; and the Photos page for galleries of photos from the meeting and the tours.